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ERIE COUNTY

Collins wins higher salary for appointee

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Chris Collins should be allowed to restore a nearly \$130,000-a-year job for one of his appointees, a majority of county lawmakers decided Thursday.

The appointee, Michelle A. Mazzone, had served as the county executive's director of real estate and asset management for a couple of years, but her salary was paid by Erie County's state-appointed control board.

Her job was to arrange a more-efficient use of county-owned space, limiting the bureaucracy's sprawl into rented quarters.

The control board eventually reasoned that if Mazzone had saved the government more than \$4 million, as Collins claimed, then he had the money to pay her without a control board "efficiency grant."

Collins added Mazzone's \$129,500 salary to the 2011 budget, using county taxpayer dollars that he and the Legislature control.

Legislature Democrats soon deleted the job, figuring that if the control board deemed it unworthy of its resources, they were not going to finance it either. They directed the money toward community programs and their other priorities.

With the job deleted, Collins at the start of 2011 parked Mazzone in a vacancy found among his immediate support staff. It paid her at a rate of \$77,000 a year while his aides returned to the Legislature to ask members to restore Mazzone's old, better-paid position.

At \$129,500, she will again earn one of the highest salaries in county government, more than goes to the sheriff or county comptroller, the social services commissioner

or the county budget director, noted Legislator Lynn M. Marinelli, D-Town of Tonawanda.

It's also more than the salaries of the county executive and deputy county executive, said Marinelli, who was willing to leave Mazzone in the lower-paid job.

To return Mazzone to the higher salary, the Collins team turned to its Legislature coalition — six lawmakers in the Republican bloc plus three Democrats who often side with them: Christina W. Bove of West Seneca, Timothy Whalen of Buffalo and Legislature Chairwoman Barbara Miller-Williams, also of Buffalo.

Without commenting during a spirited debate, the three Democrats voted to restore Mazzone's post. The final measure was approved, 9-6.

In another matter, lawmakers unanimously completed the first of three steps required to ensure that the county's sales tax rate remains at 8.75 cents on the dollar, the highest in upstate.

Lawmakers approved a statement asking state legislators from the area to introduce bills that let Erie County continue levying the penny added to the sales tax to pull county government out of its 1985 financial crisis and the three-quarters of a cent added to pull the government out of a similar crisis 20 years later.

Erie County would lose authority to charge the extra 1.75 percent beyond Nov. 30 without State Legislature approval. The 1.75 percent pulls in more than \$200 million a year from consumers.

Bills are expected to be introduced by Assemblyman Robin Schimminger, D-Kenmore, and Sen. Michael H. Ranzenhofer, R-Amherst, who had been unwilling to raise Erie County's sales tax when he served as a county legislator in 2005.

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Comments

SORT: NEWEST FIRST | OLDEST FIRST

Fantastic, Chris. Reminds me of a spoiled child who must get their way. And what of the \$150k salary that was "too low" for his county attorney appointee? I'm going to vomit when the morons in this county reelect this d-bag to another term.

LOU BORDONARO, BUFFALO, NY on Fri Mar 25, 2011 at 03:53 PM

FLAG AS INAPPROPRIATE

A band of thieves with the purses of taxpayer money. They should be voted out ! Go get 'em Tea Party, Democrat and Republican watchdogs. Go sig 'em Gov. Cuomo and your panel on spending frivolity. Or maybe we should say "HOORAY FOR KING COLLINS" and let his appointees shower him with thousands of those extra dollars he gave them as his appointees for his next election war chest.

PHILIP JAMES JAROSZ, BUFFALO, NY on Fri Mar 25, 2011 at 10:50 AM

FLAG AS INAPPROPRIATE

Incredible! What was Ms. Mazzone doing for her \$77,000 job that she would be unwilling or incapable of doing without a raise to \$129,500? Who wants to calculate that percentage increase? Has Mr. Collins considered offering that same job at 39 hours/wk and downgrading it to a part time job? Is Mr. Collins offering that same percentage increase to all county employees? Will Mr. Collins call this increase in spending an increase in spending? On the heels of his stance concerning the payscale for the new county lawyer does Mr. Collins intend to discontinue the use and expense of private lawfirms to litigate his many cases? Will this sales tax bill endorsed by the county legislative coalition Republican majority be heralded by the Republican party and its pundits as a tax increase or a tax and spend deal? Will Mr. Collins go on record as supporting tax increase? Will he run on that platform?

ROBERT H. MACCALLUM, SLOAN, NY on Fri Mar 25, 2011 at 09:20 AM

FLAG AS INAPPROPRIATE

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